

# The



# Vista

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New Sick Call  
0800-1030

Follow up Sick Call  
1300-1330

\*Soldiers must have sick call  
slip from unit when reporting

## JTF VISTA receives new Commander



*Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson*

Col. Nate Reddicks receives the Joint Task Force VISTA guidon from Brig. Gen. Louis Antonetti during a traditional Change of Command Ceremony on March 15, 2007. This symbolic gesture officially transferred command authority of JTF Vista from Col. Kevin Ellsworth to his former deputy.

By Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson  
*Joint Task Force VISTA*

OPERATION JUMP START in California received new leadership on Thursday, March 15, as an Air Force "full bird" emerged from within JTF VISTA's own ranks to replace pioneer Commander, Army Col. Kevin Ellsworth.

"Colonel Reddicks... You're the right officer to take over as Commander of this task force," declared Deputy Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Louis Antonetti, as he officially installed the new Commander during a Change of Command ceremony

steeped in Army customs and tradition.

Col. Nate Reddicks, formerly deputy to the outgoing Commander, immediately signed his first public official act as Commander – a Certificate of Appreciation for his former boss, Col. Ellsworth, in recognition of his accomplishments during the time he ran the organization.

Col. Ellsworth became the first commanding officer of JTF VISTA in June 2006, when Governor Schwarzenegger ordered California National Guard troops

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Deputy Commander

**LT. COL. PETER SHANER**  
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The editorial content is edited, prepared and provided by the JTF VISTA Public Affairs Office. All photographs are CNG or CBP photographs unless otherwise indicated.

The Vista continually solicits news items, photographs and creative works that are relevant to members of JTF VISTA, OPERATION JUMP START and the Southwest Border Mission.

Materials may be submitted to the Public Affairs Office in person at either the El Centro or San Diego sector headquarters, or FISC Logistics Support Center, Coronado Island; or by email: Michael.R.Drake@us.army.mil.

Please call (619) 545-9897/9899 for more information. Deadline is the fifth of every month.

By Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson  
*Joint Task Force VISTA*

**Sir, every new leader brings a new style of leadership. Is there anything particular about your own style of leadership that you would like to share with JTF VISTA personnel?**

Well, you're not going to see much that will be "new" as far as my management style to anyone who has been on orders with JTFV over the last 4-5 months. I'm an eyeball-to-eyeball, handshake-to-handshake people person. We have been and will continue dealing with a lot of changing mission realities. I like being up-front and direct as we work to find solutions to our assorted mission issues. My style of management is pretty much hands-on for issue identification / development and hands-off during the solution-working process. Some would like to describe it as collaborative, but I will make the final decision when I need to make that decision, and I will do what I'm asking others to do. So don't expect a lot of changes in style . . . . I've often said that I'll outwork anyone that I lead. It has always been a goal of mine to lead by example those who work under my command.

**Would you say you're very comfortable working with the Army, coming from an Air Force background? And can you tell us about any of the similarities and differences that you have to deal with, that actually help in your job?**

[Laughs] It's all military service. When I was in theater back in 2004, you would easily forget who was in the Army or in the Navy, the Marines or the Air Force. We were all defending one and the same country, and we were all sharing the same "sometimes" difficult experiences. In general there are probably a lot more similarities than there are differences. I know we like to say there are lots of differences, but I really think not. I believe most everyone in uniform wants to be considered the "best of the best" military professional in their chosen career field. I also believe that everyone wearing the uniform wants to do the right things and knows that it's important to always do the right thing. I think that everyone in the military, on the whole, has a tremendous amount of integrity, honesty and devotion to service before self. So it's not really differences among the services, but unique mission requirements that we're talking about. Air Force will tell you that "ours is to fly and fight." The Army will tell you it's to "take and hold ground." Bottom-line: We are more effective and the mission is a lot easier to accomplish when we bring our assorted specialties and work the mission together.

**At the Change of Command ceremony, you signed your first official act as new Commander of JTF VISTA. What is the significance of that Certificate of Appreciation that you awarded to Col.**



Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson  
Col. Nate Reddicks, the new JTF VISTA Commander, is an experienced Air Force senior officer who formerly served as Deputy Commander for TF AEROSAFE South after the 9/11 attacks.

### Ellsworth, now and for the future?

If you were a member of Operations AEROSAFE, or if you served overseas in any contingency operation, you received a certificate of appreciation for your service for being a part of that particular mission. This is the same sort of thing. This certificate is for military members of the California National Guard who are serving in OPERATION JUMP START at the southwest border. Particularly personnel who have served in excess of 30 days in good order, and have departed the mission. We wanted to let them know that we appreciated them volunteering to come down here. Actually, the one I signed for Col. Ellsworth was "hot off the press." It was the first certificate confirmed based on the fact that he was departing the mission, and remembering that he was the first to report to the mission with "boots on the ground." In the future, everyone who serves more than 30 days on the mission, in good order and discipline, will receive one of these either when your orders end, or when you voluntarily

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**Commander, From Page 2**

depart. If you have already departed the mission prior to 19 March 2007, we'll go back and confirm all who fit the criteria and mail the certificate to their home of record, so that all participants receive their "Thank You" from the state of California, from the Army and Air National Guard of California, and from the citizens of California.

**You assume authority at a time when there's still talk of an eventual drawdown of personnel. Can you update us on the latest information with regards to that matter?**

The only sure thing is that there will be a drawdown and this mission will eventually come to an end. That fact was and is part of the original planning construct. The question to debate is, when will the downsizing take place? One of the results of doing the job well - as JTF VISTA has - is that we have had a positively "negative" effect on the "bad guys" bringing drugs into the country and "illegal" immigrants trying to move north across our borders. The downsize will come, but the magnitude of it needs to be decided by persons of higher rank than I. It calls for decisions to be made by people in state government, in Washington D.C... It's about the how and the when. I don't know for sure what the magnitude will be. You've probably heard numbers like 600, 950, and 1,200... You've even probably heard that we're never going to downsize! Well, the truth is that we're currently on track moving to an end-strength of 1,200 and holding. That is, until orders from higher dictate otherwise.

**What is the latest on the investigation of the missing hard drive? Do you intend to maintain the case open until there's a definite finding as to what happened?**

The task force has basically done what we were supposed to do from the standpoint of attempts to recover the hard drive and what I would call "after-loss actions." The case has been turned over to CID for review and processing. They're currently conducting an investigation. What we're doing as JTFV is getting on with the job a little smarter and wiser. The loss has helped us identify numerous OPSEC issues that we now have to respond to and correct. Whether it's how we use electronic equipment or how we manage the data that is maintained on electronic equipment, everyone must now work hard to protect personal information that is exposed in our working areas; i.e. the unnecessary use of social security numbers, and so on. We're now working in the task force to institute a change of mindset on how people think about this sort of information. Because it is important... identity theft is something that's out there. People deal with it every day, and it costs this nation's citizens millions and millions of dollars annually. We are all responsible as to how data is used, accessed, and maintained here at the Task Force, for all the members of the Task Force. So we're adjusting policies right now, changing how we handle the day to day processing activities, and working to get the necessary changes into our work-place habits. What you say on the phone, how you say it, how you write things down, and what you leave on your desk... all of that is what we're currently adapting to, because it's preventative and these changing practices are the only way we can ensure we do not have another incident. The case of the hard drive itself will go on until the CID has done its part, but for JTFV personnel, hopefully lessons learned as a result of the incident will go with all of us

into future missions, whatever they may be. We are now learning what "Right" looks like.

**Finally, Sir, do you have any important message, anything special, that you would like to add to what you've already said?**

I just want everyone in OPERATION JUMP START, California - Joint Task Force VISTA - to "stand proud" knowing that we have had a very interesting and intense learning curve since July 06 when this operation kicked off; that we are constantly learning new things. The one thing the Border Patrol can say, as our "ultimate customer," is that we're doing the job. And I think the troops need to know about the outstanding work they are producing on a daily basis. I think we just get better every day. The thing they need to understand is the importance of not becoming complacent, understanding that they have to keep themselves constantly involved with the mission and the changes that the mission has to go through as it morphs. Whether we downsize or not, the mission will go through some changes every day. It could change because of weather, it could change because of the number of people we have, it could change because of competitors' reactions to us being here. The mission goes on, and... we are doing an EXCELLENT job. Let's not lose focus of what this mission is all about. ... JUMP START support to the Border Patrol. We should stand proud knowing that we are better citizens in general as a result of this mission, as volunteers who responded to a Presidential Initiative. We have come together as a TEAM, we are doing the job requested, and we are doing it well!

**Thank you very much for your candid answers, Sir.**

**DON'T BE SHY.... SHOUT OUT!!!**

**Have a story to tell? Want to see your photo in the paper?**

**Contact JTF VISTA Public Affairs Office**

**(619) 545-9897/9899**

**and get recognized!!**



## CHANGE OF COMMAND, From Page 1



*Photo by Air Force Senior Airman Margo Allen*

Troops from TF VISTA – the headquarters unit of the Southwest border mission, stand at ease as they participate in the National City Armory change of command ceremony on March 15. Col. Nate Reddicks took over from Col. Kevin Ellsworth in the hour-long ceremony.

to deploy to the Southwest border to support U.S. Border Patrol efforts, under OPERATION JUMP START. Prior to assuming this responsibility, he served as the Regimental Commander of the 223<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment at Camp San Luis Obispo in the central coast of California.

“You’ve done a great job with this task force,” Brig. Gen. Antonetti acknowledged, as he bade farewell to Col. Ellsworth. “I appreciate everything you have done here with the Border Patrol. You started the mission from scratch, and you have achieved one main objective – that of increasing the Border Patrol’s mobility at the border, which in turn has enhanced our national security,” he added.

Col. Ellsworth, in a voice filled with emotion, later paid the same kind words forward to his supportive

wife, his staff, the unit commanders and all the troops of JTF VISTA. “We have grown together,” he said. “Communities are still counting on us to carry out the mission. This country loves you, respects you and appreciates your sacrifice.”

From the podium, he described his successor as “intelligent and decisive”, and called on everyone to give Col. Reddicks the same respect and support he had enjoyed from the Border Patrol, state officials and the task force personnel. Col. Ellsworth had the opportunity to work for several months as the incoming commander’s supervisor, thereby setting a great example of how Army and Air Force can work together, as a unit, within a joint task force structure.

Before joining JTF VISTA as Deputy Commander in October 2006, Col. Reddicks served as the

Mission Support Group Commander of the 163<sup>rd</sup> Refueling Wing at March Air Reserve Base here in California. He has spent almost 30 years of his life in the Air Guard, having joined as an enlisted airman in 1978. From Oct. 2001 to June 2002, he was Deputy Commander of another joint task force - OPERATION AEROSAFE for southern California – following the 9/11 attacks, assuming responsibility for the security of some 15 airports in the region.

Col. Reddicks, therefore, brings a wealth of much needed homeland security experience to the top

job at JTF VISTA. He also brings with him a unique style of leadership that many observers have characterized as charismatic and personable.

At the end of the ceremony that saw him assume authority as the new commander, Col. Reddicks told “**The Vista**” that his style may be different, but his objectives remain the same as those of his predecessor. “I am a different guy, and I may do some things differently, but the mission continues, and I’ll continue to do the best job I can to accomplish it,” he said.



*Photo by Air Force Senior Airman Margo Allen*

A soldier proudly holds out Joint Task Force VISTA’s brand new guidon in front of the task force formation during the March 15 ceremony. The passing of this guidon from Col. Ellsworth to Col. Reddicks symbolized an effective transfer of authority.

OPSEC- Protect your Government Equipment

# Col. Ellsworth says good-bye

It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of June of last year when we received the order from Governor Schwarzenegger to deploy California National Guard forces to the border on OPERATION JUMP START. Our mission was to help U.S. Border Patrol gain operational control of our southern border. It would be a mission like no other before it - military forces, both army and air, working with civilian law enforcement under Title 32 orders with federal funding. Furthermore, it would be an all-volunteer force comprised of Army and Air Guard troops from units across the state. By August, a mere seven weeks after we began initial planning we had over 1000 Soldiers and Airmen deployed in San Diego and El Centro sectors serving in support roles. These included engineers to build and maintain border infrastructure, aviation personnel for observation and transport, administration, communications, vehicle and building maintenance, range safety operations and entry identification teams. It is a list of skill sets the Guard already has and they were aptly applied to priority Border Patrol missions. During the past ten months over 2000 of California's finest have stepped forward to once again serve their state

and nation on this critical mission.

Our efforts have already paid huge dividends. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Customs and Border Protection, apprehensions are down which means fewer people are attempting to cross our border illegally. JTF Vista has been instrumental in much improved Border Patrol vehicle operational rates. Our extra "eyes and ears" on the border have allowed hundreds of Border Patrol agents to return to their front-line law enforcement duties. At stations throughout California we have truly blended the two forces.

As I look back at how this mission began, and where we have come today, I do so with great pride. It has been my distinct honor and pleasure to serve as Commander for Joint Task Force VISTA. This task force is made up of highly skilled, motivated and professional Soldiers and Airmen - California's finest.

I have left the mission for a new assignment in Sacramento. However, I will still have a great interest in this mission and your success. I know that you will all render the same outstanding support to Col. Nate Reddicks as he assumes command of the task force. He is one of the finest



**Col. Kevin Ellsworth**

officers I have ever worked with and I leave knowing the task force is in the hands of an intelligent, decisive, and compassionate leader.

In the coming weeks, many of you will depart for other deployments in the Global War on Terror. I wish you success in your new mission, God speed, and a safe return to your loved ones. For those of you remaining on the border mission, I wish you all continued success. It has been an honor to serve with you and I look forward to seeing you in the future.

## JTF Staff say farewell, thank you to Col. Ellsworth

By Master Sgt. Michael Drake  
*Joint Task Force VISTA*

The night before the passing of the guidon and the formal Change of Command Ceremony at National City, JTF commanders and other senior staff gave their own going away party for Colonel Kevin Ellsworth. Approximately 50 persons from Joint Task Force VISTA attended the event held at the Admiral Baker Clubhouse that included drinks on the patio followed by dinner.

After the meal, Brigadier General Louis Antonetti, the outgoing Deputy Adjutant General for Joint Staff Division and newly appointed Commander of the California Army National Guard, praised Colonel Ellsworth's work during his nearly nine months on the border mission. He recounted how Colonel Ellsworth volunteered for the job before there was a task force, and how he built the organization from scratch. He also gave an admonition to those present to take care of Soldiers and Airmen - first and always. In a stern voice and firm tone, the general said, "You can break

a Humvee; you can break other equipment; but you better never break a Soldier."

Colonel Nate Reddicks, the new commander for the task force, reiterated Colonel Ellsworth's contributions and said he was looking forward to the challenge.

The highlight of the evening, and certainly some of the more humorous moments, came during the presentation of gifts to the outgoing commander. These ranged from the beautiful to the bizarre: plaques and shadow boxes to a bottle of water dipped from the New River (America's most polluted waterway) and a bottle of El Centro sand nicely packaged in a discarded Corona bottle.

It was a casual and frequently light-hearted conclusion to nine months of successes interspersed with occasional moments of tribulation, as well as a heart-felt thank you to a commander who began a mission with nothing more than a directive and ideas and leadership skills and built it into an effective tool in our Homeland Security Mission.

## "Road Show"--positive feedback amidst serious issues discussed

By Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson  
*Joint Task Force VISTA*

Top level staff members of the JTF VISTA launched the organization's first-ever command "road show" on March 5 and 6 in San Diego and El Centro respectively. The event started at the Naval Amphibious Base Theater, Coronado Island, during the morning hours of Monday, March 5. Another session was held at the same venue later in the afternoon. El Centro got its own share of two shows the next day, as the road show came by, offering troops the opportunity to interact with some of the leadership from task force headquarters.

### **AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK**

Lt. Col. George Leone of the J-1 explained, "This road show is an update on where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going. It's an opportunity for us, the staff officers, to meet face to face with you the troops who are actually carrying out our mission in the field everyday."

Col. Kevin Ellsworth, outgoing Commander for JTF VISTA, and his staff went out to discuss burning issues directly with the Soldiers and Airmen. The road show was held as a town hall-type forum for exchange of information and ideas between task force leadership and rank-and-file servicemembers.

### **THE HARD DRIVE TOPIC**

During the briefings, staff members and troops discussed many serious issues concerning the lives of servicemembers deployed on OPERATION JUMP START. One of the topics that came up was that of a computer hard drive reported missing from the headquarters building a couple of days earlier.

According to official accounts, JTF VISTA personnel working at the J-1 Office (personnel administration) discovered on Feb. 23, 2006, that a backup hard drive containing the personal information of Guardsmen

assigned to the Southwest Border mission had disappeared from a locked cabinet used to store personnel files.

During the town hall meeting at Naval Amphibious Base Theater, Col. Ellsworth joined voices with Lt. Col. Leone, the Personnel Officer (J-1), to advise troops on how best to protect their personal information from possible compromise.

"We still believe that the hard drive was stolen for its physical value, and not because of the information contained in it," said Col. Ellsworth, who also told the troops he was deeply disturbed by the unfortunate development. "However, we would still advise you to notify the credit report bureaus, to monitor your credit activity regularly, and to avoid responding to unsolicited requests for confirmation of your personal information from any source."

Lt. Col. Leone insisted on the protection of social security numbers as a countermeasure to identity theft. "We have also undertaken serious measures, using advanced technology to secure our backup data behind Department of Defense firewalls, to ensure that this never happens again," he said.

"On this missing hard drive issue, I would like to reassure all of you that we're doing our best – all that we can do at this time – to resolve the problem," Col. Ellsworth repeated. "We're contacting everybody. CID is investigating the matter. Be vigilant on your side to make sure you're not a victim of any abuse. And, please, report any suspected activity to us."

The road show offered an opportunity to remind all JTF VISTA personnel of the importance of physical and operational security. But that was not the only item on the agenda during the scheduled public events.

### **DRAWDOWN?**

The whole event was conducted with light humor, even when leadership

addressed another serious issue – that of the upcoming possible drawdown. Lt. Col. Leone explained that the drawdown had always been part of the plan from the beginning of OPERATION JUMP START. Currently it is unclear when or how the drawdown will occur, and JTF Vista leadership awaits guidance from Washington D.C and State government.

"We'll apply the most objective criteria to attain our drawdown objective," Lt. Col. Leone told the audience. "First of all, we'll lose a good number by those who express the personal preference of leaving on their own. Secondly, we're losing even greater numbers to mobilizations – Soldiers and Airmen departing for Iraq or Afghanistan. Then we'll consider releasing servicemembers who have two or more negative counseling statements on record. Finally, we'll go into overall individual job performance."

The J-1 boss also added that all personnel affected by the eventual drawdown will receive at least 120 days notice prior to being released from the mission. "The J-1 will also assist with re-employment counseling and direction," he promised. "We'll try to make your transition as painless as possible," he added.

### **OTHER TOPICS**

Also discussed was the mission's zero tolerance policy on substance abuse, proper out-processing procedures from billeting, the integration of risk management and safety measures in all operations, a reminder of the commander's policy against all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, the effects of redeployment on family readiness, and a refresher on the rules of engagement, levels of force and criminal liability for those operating in the field.

Remember-- THINK SAFETY!!!



# Guardsmen aid in rescue of civilian left in desert

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

Members of Task Force Wily played a role in the search and rescue of a man missing for close to five days between San Diego and El Centro.

Chief Warrant Officer Brandon Lynch, a pilot in the California National Guard, and Maj. Clayton Braun, a pilot with the Washington National Guard, assisted the Border Patrol's Search, Trauma and Rescue (BORSTAR) team to evacuate an individual attempting to cross the Southwest border near Inkopah Mountain. Chief Warrant Officer Lynch and Maj. Braun were flying an OH-58 "Kiowa" reconnaissance mission when they were re-directed to aid rescuers.

"Anytime we hear that someone's life is in danger, at that point we make an assessment and we have to change the mission," said Chief Warrant Officer Lynch, a Guardsman since 1999. "Right then we go into search and rescue mode. We try to find the area and get immediate help."

Chief Warrant Officer Lynch and Maj. Braun had just become airborne when they were radioed to change course and flew to a site where Border Patrol agents were waiting. The agents were one-by-one transported to a site near the injured man. The engines were then shut down so that the pilots could offer further assistance.

Once the civilian was stabilized, the Guard pilots helped carry a litter

up a steep, rocky hillside. They then found a safe landing zone for a Marine medivac helicopter to transport the injured man to a hospital. Chief Warrant Officer Lynch said it took several long minutes to export the man out of the ravine due to the terrain's difficulty.

"At the site, there was a Border Patrol aircraft already there, but it had to break station because it was low on fuel," he said. "We were asked to stick around and give assistance on the ground."

The Kiowa is a two-passenger aircraft. The one they flew that day came from Washington and contained a special "night-capable sensor" that can track people in the toughest, darkest elements. It is not designed to transport personnel; otherwise it would have been used to fly the injured man.

"It just so happened that Chief Lynch and I were in the air at the time and were available to respond," said Maj. Braun. "We didn't hesitate. We wanted to help. After we scouted the landing zone, we vectored the rescue helicopter in. The good news is that we helped save the guy's life. A lot of times, by the time rescuers get there, it's too late."

Official reports state the individual suffered a broken leg, blood loss, shock, exposure and dehydration. He remained hospitalized in San Diego county for weeks.

"Anytime we come across someone injured we want to ensure they get



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

California Guardsmen serving on Joint Task Force VISTA help Border Patrol agents rescue a man who was abandoned in the desert mountains between San Diego and El Centro.

medical attention as soon as possible," added Chief Warrant Officer Lynch.

"That's the nature of the Guard," echoed Maj. Braun. "We do everything we can not just for the military, but especially for the civilian population."

Missions such as this are Maj. Lynch's forte. He is based out of the 1/168<sup>th</sup> Air Wing at Mather Field, Sacramento, where normal duties include rescue missions. With Task Force Wily, Maj. Lynch flies UH-60s (Blackhawks) and the Kiowas.

This is not the first time Guardsmen serving on Joint Task Force VISTA have assisted in rescue efforts, according to Maj. Will Gentle, Task Force Wily commander. A similar rescue was performed in September 2006 in the Sand Hills, an area of rolling sand dunes devoid of vegetation, approximately 15 miles wide and 50 miles long.

"When you help save lives, you feel good about it," said Maj. Gentle. "We're glad we were there to help."

## Engineer honored, slated for retirement

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

Task Force Steel Castle honored one of its own recently for his outstanding performance.

Sgt. Steven Webber, a member of Joint Task Force VISTA's engineering team, received the Commander's Coin and Certificate of Excellence from Maj. Nick Ducich, TF Steel Castle commander, March 16 during an

internal ceremony.

Sgt. Webber, who retires in April, served the mission in various roles. During OPERATION JUMP START, the Soldier took on positions in construction, welding and as a heavy equipment operator. He was also the unit's morale, welfare and recreation noncommissioned officer who coordinated unit Christmas parties and other activities.

"He's an outstanding Soldier and key member of Steel Castle," Maj. Ducich said.

Chief Master Sgt. Kenneth Cedenio, Steel Castle chief master sergeant, acknowledged Sgt. Webber as a gifted Soldier. Sgt. Webber also instructed team members on the use of excavators, backhoes and other heavy equipment.



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

Sgt. Steven Webber is honored for his hard work while on mission.

# Soldiers run in honor of Californians killed overseas

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

About eight hours after it began, the California National Guard put an end to the 2007 Los Angeles Marathon.

Soldiers from various units of the 40th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Los Alamitos, along with individuals from other National Guard entities, took part in the 22nd running of California's prestigious race March 4.

Sgt. Maj. Javier Becerra, human resources chief, 40th ID, led a mixed detachment that was warmly recognized at the start & finish of the 26.2-mile race. Their presence was important. The Soldiers donned T-shirts listing the names of fellow Guardsmen who died in OPERATIONS IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM.

"First and foremost was a group of Soldiers who wanted to show their gratitude for our fallen comrades. We could have done this in tennis shoes and running equipment, but it would not have carried any meaning," said Sgt. Maj. Becerra. "The uniform and shirts had a meaning. We were asked many times 'Why the uniform, boots and black shirts?' We wanted people to ask us. We stopped so many times for pictures with strangers, people who lost a loved one or just a friend who was serving their country overseas."

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa commended the Guardsmen's attendance, saying they added a security element to the thousands in place and stationed in key city points.

"The fact that they're here to honor their own tells a great story about our National Guard," Mr. Villaraigosa said. "It's an honor to have the National Guard here, and admirable that they're running the Los Angeles Marathon in memory of those who died."

Sgt. Maj. Becerra and 1st Sgt. Bobby B. Chavez, operations sergeant, 40th Special Troops Battalion, paced the unit through the course. They walked a few, ran a few. They regrouped toward the end. In formation, about a dozen marched to the finish line, receiving applause from thousands of spectators.

"We wanted to get a group of Soldiers together and make it through the course in honor of our fallen comrades," 1st Sgt. Chavez explained.

"We educated the public. They saw a different side of Soldiers, gave them something to cheer about," added Sgt. Maj. Becerra. "Just the way we came in at the end. Even though we took a long time and the crowd was probably less than half of what it could have been if we came in earlier, it was great to hear the cheers and see people standing to applaud."

Three members of Joint Task Force VISTA, California's southwest border mission for OPERATION JUMP START, ran individually and completed the challenge. Sgt. Martin Figueroa of Task Force Phoenix made his marathon debut, finishing in 4:58:53. He placed 6,368th overall among the 25,000 who registered.

"As a child growing up in Los Angeles, I thought it



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

Sgt. Maj. Javier Becerra (right) leads a detachment from the 40th Infantry Division at the start of the 22nd Annual Los Angeles Marathon March. 4. The Soldiers participated in honor of 23 California National Guardsmen who died serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

was a good idea to do it," said Sgt. Figueroa. "All I wanted was to finish and be standing at the end."

Sgt. Figueroa credits Lt. Evelyn Macias-Smerker, also with Task Force Phoenix, for motivating and convincing him to run. This was Lt. Macias-Smerker's fifth marathon. She finished in 5:05:22.

Lt. Col. Pete Shaner, Joint Task Force VISTA executive officer, broke the four-hour barrier. He finished respectfully in 3:48:58. Lt. Col. Shaner was the 1,064th runner to finish.

"I just wanted to do it without stopping, Lt. Col. Shaner said. "It was amazing to see the entire city of Los Angeles turn out. The entire route was lined with people. It's like a 26-mile long block party."

Lt. Col. Shaner achieved a personal goal. He has never run a faster marathon, he said.

Tech. Sgt. Joseph Prouse of the 163rd March Air Reserve Base clocked in at 5:13:27. Lt. John Gunty, also of the 163rd, ran a 4:34:38 finish. He was 4,060th overall.

Nairobi Fred Mogaka was the overall winner in 2:17:44. The victory earned

him \$100,000 and a 2007 Honda Accord. Ramilia Burangulova took the women's title in 2:37:54.

Members of the 40th ID helped commence the Los Angeles Marathon. A four-man color guard stood proud as a ceremonial opening was held. And as the flock of runners, walkers, joggers and wheelchair racers took off, Soldiers provided a human barrier to protect the race's timing equipment. They cheered those passing by, giving runners high-fives and back pats.

Immediately after the thousands had cleared the starting line, Sgt. Maj. Becerra formed up his detachment. Together they embarked on a 26.2-mile tribute to the California Guard's bravest. Those who finished gutted through the heat, dehydration and blisters. But it didn't matter. They knew that the fallen Soldiers, especially their families and loved ones, had battled through much worse discomforts.

"It's all in honor of the 23 Californians killed on the Global War on Terrorism," said the 40th ID's Capt. Lorraine Lissitz.



# TF Steel Castle gets more engineers 21E-certified

By Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson  
Joint Task Force VISTA

"The unique thing about this ceremony is that it marks the completion of a course conducted while carrying out a real world mission." With those words, 1st Lt. John Goulart of TF Steel Castle's operations office opened an atypical graduation ceremony for 30 of its own personnel freshly trained, qualified and certified in the mission-critical 21E military occupational specialty (MOS).

The 21E MOS is the Army code for Heavy Construction Equipment Operator – one of the most prized skills required by the Southwest border mission. For that reason, task force authorities contacted an accredited Army schoolhouse to come on the ground and conduct a course that ended with the certification of some 30 Soldiers in that critical specialty.

The graduation ceremony took place during the early morning hours of Friday, March 2, off Dairy Mart Road just a few yards from the U.S.-Mexico border fence. The presence of JTF VISTA Commander, Col. Kevin Ellsworth and a special guest speaker, retired Col. Gregory Peck, gave the occasion the high profile that it deserved.

The 30 TF Steel Castle servicemembers completed two weeks of intense training under the guidance of highly skilled and experienced instructors from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 91st Institutional Training (IT). The instructors from Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri compressed an 8-week active duty course into a two-week variation of intense training and practical exercise right there at Russian Hill. They did everything to get the Soldiers well trained and ready to resume their mission-critical duties of constructing the reinforced modern border fence structure around the Russian Hill area, and wherever else they may be called to serve at the Southwest border.

"We met everything that we needed on the ground in order to make the course a success," said Master Sgt. Ronald Bodkins, the lead instructor. "When the California National Guard contacted us to train 30 Soldiers in the 21E MOS, we sent out a list of requirements that they had to meet prior to our arrival to do the training. I can assure you that the folks here at JTF VISTA met those requirements beyond expectation, and that made it so much easier for us to carry out the training right here in the field."

Speaking during the graduation ceremony, Col. Peck expressed gratitude to the organizers for having given him a chance to "get [his] hands in the dirt again after having been in the engineering world for such a long time." He commended the instructors from Ft. Leonard Wood for excellent training, and the graduates for proving that they had learned their lessons well, as evidenced by all the work accomplished at Russian Hill.

"Your construction of the fence has increased the ability of the Border Patrol to conduct operations that increase our security and allow law enforcement to effectively reduce the flow of narcotics and mitigate national security risks," Col. Peck told the 21E graduates and the audience of TF Steel Castle personnel. "I salute you as citizen-soldiers for



*Photo by Army Staff Sgt. Nfor Julio Barthson*

Trainers and graduates of the 21E course respectively receive certificates of appreciation and completion during a graduation ceremony on March 2 just a few yards from the U.S.-Mexico border fence. The course was conducted and completed during a real world homeland security mission.

the sacrifices you are making here, away from your homes and families."

Col. Peck, who retired from the Army National Guard after 33 years of service in 1999, only to return to State Active Duty (SAD) following the 9-11 attacks in 2001, is an inductee of the Engineer Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame. He served in the past as Emergency Plans Coordinator for Southern California - supporting counties, cities and private industry in developing security plans; also supervising Military Assistance to Civilian Authorities (MACA) – and as the Commander of the Joint Forces Training Base (JFTB) at Los Alamitos, California. He was specially invited by Col. Ellsworth to deliver the motivational address and hand out the certificates, due to his experience and personal achievements in military engineering over several decades.

"I was really inspired by the words of Col. Peck," said Sgt. Christopher Casteel, a member of the Horizontal or Second Platoon, TF Steel Castle, who graduated from the 21E course. "From the course itself, I gained new knowledge of safety techniques in operating heavy equipment. The Mobile Training Team from Ft. Leonard Wood was outstanding and exceptionally knowledgeable."

Before the new 21E specialists received their diplomas from Col. Peck and ceremoniously shook hands with the official party, TF Steel Castle Commander, Maj. Nick Ducich and his Senior Enlisted Advisor, Chief Master Sgt. Kenneth Cedeno, handed out certificates of gratitude to the instructors for the excellent training they provided. One of the instructors, Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Murchison, is a veteran of both OPERATIONS DESERT STORM and RESTORE HOPE, who came out of retirement and brought with him twenty years of experience to share with younger Soldiers.

At the end of the graduation ceremony, Col. Ellsworth also bestowed upon Air Force 1st Lt. Joseph Palacio of TF Steel Castle, an Army Commendation Medal for meritorious service during OPERATION JUMP START.

# Soldiers marry while serving on OPERATION JUMP START

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

Not all is military operations on the California Southwest border. Sometimes there is love and romance.

Last November, Spc. Leslie Ruelas volunteered to serve on Joint Task Force VISTA, becoming a pharmacy technician with Task Force Phoenix. Two weeks later, Sgt. Eric Hille came aboard. He landed with Task Force Steel Castle's engineering operations section.

They had never met prior to the mission. And their duty stations split them several miles apart.

But two months later, they married. And it's been a blessing ever since.

"More than anything, we started off friends. It progressed into a beautiful relationship quickly," said Spc. Ruelas-Hille, whose uniform now dons her husband's surname. "He's my best friend. He's everything I need. He's my voice; my backbone."

At 27 years old, Sgt. Hille joined OPERATION JUMP START to extend a respectful military career that took him to Kosovo three years ago. At 19 years young, Spc. Hille has started out her life in the medical field. Finding love on the Southwest border was never an intention, they said. Nor was it the purpose for volunteering.

"When we were in-processing, they said while we're here we're going to meet a lot of people, make new friends. They even said I might meet my wife here," said Sgt. Hille. "When I heard that, I said 'Ha'. And now look at me."

The California Guardsmen met after Sgt. Hille was diagnosed with a medical ailment. She tended to his recovery, running errands and bringing food.

"I don't know, we just hit it off," she said. "He got really sick. I just wanted to see if he was OK. We then became friends."

Their love story garnered blessings and support from the chain of command. In late February, Command Sgt. Maj. Jose Gomez, Joint Task Force VISTA command sergeant major, sparked the romance. He funded a wedding cake and



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

Spc. Leslie Ruelas-Hille and Sgt. Eric Hille exchange wedding cake during a reception held in honor of their recent exchange of vows. The pair met on OPERATION JUMP START and married shortly after.

coordinated a surprise ceremony attended by both medical and engineer sections.

"It's just the right thing to do," said Command Sgt. Maj. Gomez. "They're both on the task force. They really haven't had a chance to do something like this. This helps them understand that the Army is part of their family."

"That's honorable. That says a lot about our command, to do something like this," Sgt. Hille replied.

But as quickly as they've become one, the road of separation rolled in. Sgt. Hille has since left the mission to deploy overseas. Spc. Hille remains on the task force. They have no doubts on the toll that follows a long-term separation.

"It's a good thing we're both in the military. She understands mobilization. She knows all about why I'll be gone," he said. "I married her because I love her. People think we jumped into this too fast, but Leslie and I just don't want to be apart. We know what we're doing."

They scheduled a bigger wedding and longer honeymoon upon Sgt. Hille's return in 2008.

## JTF VISTA Soldiers embark on confidence challenge

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

A dozen Soldiers serving on Joint Task Force VISTA are scheduled for deployment with the California National Guard's 1113th Transportation Company in April.

In January, they tested positive for guts and motivation after tackling the skies around Camp San Luis Obispo (SLO). The new additions to the San Jose-based unit literally upped their personal levels after completing

a vertical confidence course just outside of the SLO training site. Soldiers were challenged by obstacles that required consistent arm strength, balance and, above all, courage.

"The purpose of the training is to build confidence within each Soldier as well as build morale as a whole unit," said Sgt. 1st Class Steve Howell, 1113th first sergeant. "We asked each one of them to step up and challenge



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

Getting a breath of air is Pfc. Joshawa Petras, who completes the "double pull" section of Camp San Luis Obispo's vertical obstacle course. Pfc. Petras, a member of the 1113th Transportation Company, is slated to deploy in April.

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# Marines recognized for Southwest border support

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

Task Force Steel Castle recently held a unique ceremony to recognize close to 40 Marines who assisted Joint Task Force VISTA on the Southwest border mission.

Letters of Appreciation were issued to the Marine Wing Support Squadron 372 from Camp Pendleton, by Capt. Richard Noyes, executive officer, Task Force Steel Castle. The Feb. 22 ceremony concluded the Marines' month-long deployment, which began Jan. 28, on the California-Mexico border, east of San Diego, where they completed 1.2 miles of roadwork.

"The job they did was incredible," Capt. Noyes said. "They got a lot done, more than other rotational units that have come in recently. It was an honor to have them here."

The Marine unit utilized its own heavy equipment and National Guard materials to slope an area of road, making it accessible to Customs and

Border Protection vehicles. They worked through rugged terrain, fulfilling a mission coordinated by the California National Guard and Joint Task Force North.

"It's just good to see inter-agencies working with each other," said Marine Lt. Patrick Schroer, platoon commander and mission commander. "This is the very beginning of our work up. This was good heavy-equipment training. This is a first for us, to work with the National Guard. It was a great experience."

The Marine crew used heavy equipment vehicles, such as graders and diggers, as well as high-powered pneumatic and hand tools in the process. Lt. Schroer said this was an opportunity for his platoon to get hands-on experience operating the equipment. They're slated for future deployments overseas.

"They really did a lot more than expected. They leave with no injuries and no equipment damage," Capt.



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

Noyes added. Rotational units from various civilian and military sectors continually work on the border, Noyes noted. This is the first time since OPERATION JUMP START began where a non-National Guard organization assisted Steel Castle on the border.

## confidence, From Page 10

themselves. Their performance was outstanding."

The course involves a series of rope climbs ranging from 20 to 40 feet above ground. Ropes and cables are held up by wood poles, some standing 50 feet. The route starts with Soldiers jumping to a net and climbing upward to a base. After nine stages, it ends with a 100-yard cable slide, where Soldiers glide down with only their safety line.

The SLO course is one, if not the only, national facility that provides two obstacle lanes. Participants can attempt the course side-by-side, yet 20 feet apart. Each Soldier is harnessed into a safety line. Safety is the utmost factor and is emphasized through every stage.

"It's scary, but it was fun in the end," said Pfc. Xoyla Castillo, "I'm glad I did it. It tells a lot about yourself. You get scared but you just have to keep on driving yourself."

"The best part is the slide," added Sgt. Carlos Astete-Poblet. "You're pretty high up there. It looks higher than 35 feet. But you get your confidence going after every obstacle."

"It's like bungee-jumping, only you're not jumping," added Pvt. Thomas Gagne. "It's like a circus high-wire act. You want to keep your balance. It's pretty safe up there. You still get a little worried."

The 1113<sup>th</sup> currently prepares for deployment in April. It set temporary ground at Camp Roberts



Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza

Soldiers from the 1113th Transportation Company based out of San Jose tackle an obstacle course at Camp San Luis Obispo Jan. 21. The course was part of a two week training schedule before the Soldiers deploy. The company is scheduled to deploy in April.

between Jan. 16-26 to process, train and unit-familiarize incoming soldiers. The confidence course was incorporated into the two-week training schedule.

"It was a little break after three days of (Soldier readiness processing)," added Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Howell. "I'd say it was a productive day. It gave us a chance to see the Soldiers who will be deploying with us. The main thing is this was a confidence builder. It helps the Soldiers find something within themselves."



# Tennessee engineers bring experience to TF Steel Castle

By Sgt. Eddie Siguenza  
Joint Task Force VISTA

Add Tennessee to the list of states assisting Joint Task Force VISTA on the southwest border mission.

A platoon of Airmen from the Tennessee National Guard currently contributes to the Golden State's National Guard forces on the California-Mexico boundary. Close to 50 members of Tennessee's 134<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron, Air Refueling Wing, are linked to Task Force Steel Castle's fence and construction crew.

"We're happy to be here. It's an honor to serve with the engineers of Task Force Steel Castle and OPERATION JUMP START," Capt. White said. "We're here to support the mission in any construction improvement, whether it be in roadways, electrical or drainage improvement."

The "Volunteer State" came equipped with heavy equipment operators, structural workers and plumbers, to name a few. Capt. White credits his unit, saying they're experienced in all engineering capabilities.

"This mission helps us get more hands-on training," Capt. White added.

Capt. Richard Noyes, executive officer, Task Force Steel Castle, said several out-of-state units will rotate border duties throughout the year. Since



*Photo by Army Sgt. Eddie Siguenza*

Staff Sgt. Ashley Teaster (right) focuses through an automatic level, a type of surveying equipment, along the California-Mexico southwest border. At left is Staff Sgt. William Dawson. The duo is a member of the 134<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron of the Tennessee Air National Guard that is in California assisting Joint Task Force Vista.

OPERATION JUMP START began in June 2006, Steel Castle has been assisted by National Guard units from many states. A Marine detachment from Camp Pendleton recently completed a month-long term as well.

"We're happy to have Tennessee aboard the mission. They'll help us continue our support to the Customs and Border Protection," said Capt. Noyes.



*Photo by Army 1st Lt. Antonio Maristela*

Engineers from Task Force Steel Castle work along the California-Mexico border modifying terrain and constructing border infrastructure to include additional fencing, camera and lighting towers, roads and drainage projects. TF Steel Castle is comprised of engineers from California and other states.